WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 FEBRUARY 1989

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

HE HAD TO MARRY TO CLAIM INHERITANCE: GIRLS FROM ALL OVER AFTER ELIGIBLE ANN ARBORITE

In the winter of 1889 Washtenaw County citizens were busy cutting wood and ice, butchering hogs and worrying about the lack of snow cover needed to protect the winter wheat, one of the county's most important crops.

A fully paid fire department was "being agitated" in Ann Arbor, there was a small pox scare but the most sensational story was about Ann Arbor's most eligible bachelor, James L. Babcock who must marry within five years in order to inherit $500,000 (or was it $100,000?) from his uncle.

The weekly *Ann Arbor Courier's* editor Junius E. Beal uses the story to get in a jab at the editor of *The Ypsilantian.*

"*The Ypsilantian* calls upon some of the young ladies of that city to assist Mr. J. L. Babcock of Ann Arbor in getting his inheritance. *The Ypsilantian* is way behind. Several girls spoke weeks and weeks ago.

"The young ladies of our neighboring city are no sluggards. They are wide awake for the main chance everytime," according to the February 6, 1889, *Courier.*

The following week Beal quotes a *Chicago Globe* article headed "A Man Who Must Marry."

The reporter had waited 40 minutes at a Chicago hotel to interview "Mr. C.E. (sic) Babcock, a young gentleman from Ann Arbor who suddenly sprung into publicity on account of his Uncle's will which left him $500,000 on condition that he marry within five years."

The young man was described as "young, handsome, engaging in manners; indeed quite a matrimonial catch." He said his Uncle only died last summer, five years is a long time and he would only marry beause he wants to.

The next week, in the terse style of the day, Beal reported the wrong man had been interviewed. C.E. Babcock was actually a UM student, member of Beta Theta Phi fraternity, who must have gone along with the ruse of being the heir.

The February 27 issue said J.L. Babcock received a letter from "a

JAMES L. BABCOCK, 1890
Ann Arbor's most eligible bachelor.

languishing maiden in Germany but he concludes they couldn't understand each other very well." He also received a number of letters from England.

"His fame has reached nearly round the world," Beal states.

March 6 Beal quotes the *Ayr Advertiser* of Ayr, Scotland about the American James Babcock who will forfeit 100,000 pounds.

Actually he married, with a year to spare, a girl from Waukesha, Wisconsin, according to Samuel Beakes's *Past and Present of Washtenaw County,* 1906. They lived in the 1858 Italianate Wells house at 208 North Division when they weren't traveling.

According to the *Portrait and Biographical Album of Washtenaw County,* 1891, Babcock's Uncle Luther James left him $100,000 which would be doubled if he married within five years.

'WHAT IS IT' GAME AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS

WCHS offers a traveling exhibit of small artifacts set up as a humorous "What is it" game for children to schools and another for adults.

They are available for classes and meetings, subject to time and volunteer availability. For information call Karen O'Neal, chairwoman, 665-2242.

LYRA CHORUS MEMBERS TO TALK FEBRUARY 19

Ann Arborite LeRoy P. Gray, assisted by other members of the former Lyra Male Chorus, will talk about the chorus at the Washtenaw County Historical Society meeting at 2 p.m. Sunday, February 19, at Bentley Library.

The chorus was a voluntary group of men from all walks of life who liked to sing. No longer active, they were a regular part of the local musical scene for a number of years.

Mr. Gray himself took voice lessons from Mrs. Reuben Kempf.

The library is at 1150 Beal on the UM North Campus near Veterans Hospital. Free parking Sundays across the street with limited parking by library.

NO MARCH MEETING

WCHS President Patrick Owen announced there will be no general meeting in March. Next general meeting Sunday, April 16. The board of directors will meet as usual at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 8, at 310 South Ashley.

HISTORY CONFERENCE SET APRIL 7-8 AT WSU

The 31st annual conference on local history, "Michigan in Perspective," will be held Friday and Saturday, April 7-8, at the McGregor Conference Center on the Wayne State University Campus in Detroit.

Program topics will include oral history, genealogy, folklore and ethnic history, historical preservation, the work of museums and local historical societies and current research in local history.

It claims to be one of the largest conferences of its kind in the United States, attracting some four hundred visitors each year.

For further information contact Philip P. Mason, Director, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202, telephone (313) 577-4024.

'YE INFANT PRODIGY'

Maggie. "Why is your Hair so Gray, Mamma?"

Mamma. "Well, because you're such a Naughty Child sometimes."

Maggie. "What a Naughty Child *you* have been! Poor Grandma's Hair's *quite White!*"

From *Harper's Bazar,* January 13, 1872.

ARTIST PAINTS LOCAL SCENES WITH A DIFFERENCE

Chelsea artist Ben Bower has loved to draw since he was a child growing up in a small farming community in central Indiana and he loves old buildings.

A number of his paintings and sketches are straightforward depictions of old structures such as the "church" or Gothic barn that used to stand on Island Lake Road at Wylie west of Dexter or Webster Church in Webster township.

But as he went on the difficulties of determining in exact detail how a building looked at a given period and the desire to tell more of a story led Bower to loose his imagination and add a touch of surrealism to some of his paintings.

Thus a lady in 1910 costume may be talking to a lad of today, for example.

The artist, who is a past-president of the Chelsea Historical Society, says he developed an avid interest in history and how things were in the olden days from reading as a schoolboy, although he thinks history in school was taught in a dry manner.

"It mainly hinged on the so-called great people, dates on which they did wonderful things, mainly battles. To me this is not history as we should remember it.

"As I proceed you will notice that I have been mixing up the historical periods so that instead of just having one particular scene that would depict a certain event at a certain date in a certain year you will see things that will remind you of many things that you have read about, heard about or actually seen."

He got started with the watercolor pencils that he uses today while he was serving in World War II in the South Pacific. A buddy received a box of them in the mail one day. He wasn't interested and when Bower asked to try them, the buddy said "They're yours."

Since then, Bower estimates he has probably used thousands of them. He usually dips them in water and paints although they can be used dry.

Upon his return from service he studied a couple of years at Indiana University and graduated from a commercial art school in Ohio. He met his wife, a Michigan girl, in Indiana. He credits her with being a constant source of encouragement.

Chelsea artist Ben Bower likes to wander around Ann Arbor and paint interesting scenes and buildings. This is his interpretation of Milt Kemnitz's interpretation of Rembrandt which hangs in an alley off East Liberty Street.

Before retirement, he was office manager of the Waterloo Recreation Area office for 25 years.

He showed his first watercolor pencil paintings of Hawaiian flowers and early pictures of old buildings including a round barn and Webster Church. He then showed and commented on 16 more recent paintings.

1. An old farm house with an old car in the foreground. "The old house has been gone for 50-60 years, the old car too. They were not in the same location but they seem to be a winning combination. The title of this is 'End of a Dream, Depression of the '30s.'

"In some areas around here, after a few years of farming the soil was simply worn out and there was nothing left to grow anything. Finally the government bought the land and created recreation land. That is what happened at that location.

2. An old house north of Chelsea. "I got to thinking there's more to that than just the old house so I put the boy in there (looking over the fence at the house). The boy is thinking of when his grandpa was alive and what life was like in those days.

3. There were many beautiful homes built in Chelsea at one time. This has been retained as the McKune Memorial Library on Main Street. It started as a family home, became an inn, a hotel and finally a library.

It was built in 1850 as the second home of Elisha Congdon II who with his brother James earlier founded Chelsea.

4. "This is my interpretation of Milt Kemnitz's interpretation of Rembrandt" in an alley just north of East Liberty Street. Bower's picture has three people looking at the Rembrandt portrait and wondering about it.

"This is one that many people say, 'Where is it? I've never seen it.' " (It can be glimpsed from South Fifth Avenue by looking across the parking lot between Ann Arbor Theater and Afternoon Delight Restaurant.)

5. The old Ann Arbor firehall, now Hands On Museum. The new firehall is in the background and in use, although Bower painted a fire truck in the old building. He added a green tree for more color.

His caption says it was built in 1882-83, William Scott was the architect. The first full-time firemen were hired in 1888, the department motorized in 1915 and the new station started in 1977.

He says the ground floor accommodated "steamers, hand engines, hook and ladder truck, stables, coal bin, kitchen, dining room, bedrooms, office and meeting room." Upstairs was the hayloft to store horse feed.

6. "The Deke Shant behind a wall on East William is bypassed unnoticed by many people." The first

UM fraternity building, it was designed by William LeBaron Jenney, the first UM professor of architecture.

It has been changed inside but is still used by Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity according to the caption. Carved wooden paddles hang inside the door. Hand carved fraternity "thrones" of 1878 are used for fraternity meetings.

7. The building at 300 East Washington Street at South Fifth Avenue, now Garris law offices. "Perhaps some of you remember when it was the Silver Lead Paint Company. I haven't yet had a chance to dig into the history of it but it is an interesting building, especially with the large new building in the background for contrast."

(Perhaps some readers, like the editor, remember when it was Anderson Paint Company.)

8. Scene with U.S. flag with stripes in rainbow colors with a group of children dressed in the same colors. It was flown from the terrace of an upstairs apartment in the alley south from West Liberty that runs behind Kline's Department Store.

"You probably saw a picture of this in the paper at one time. The flag was made for the Rainbow Coalition with the idea of the many races that now inhabit Ann Arbor, so much so that it has been compared to San Francisco on a smaller scale."

9. A line of children riding on an elephant's back. "We have a circus coming to town and these are Ann Arbor kids who had a chance to ride an elephant."

10. David's Books on East Liberty at State Street. "Here's where I get into mixing up the periods. It's a scene you might see any day of the week except, perhaps, in the coldest months—somebody examining the books, a young lady wondering why a young man is admiring the antique car instead of her."

"This is a 1928 Stutz that may or may not have ever been in Ann Arbor."

11. Dooley's Bar, 310 Maynard Street near East Liberty. "Dooley's at times gets a lot of attention in the papers due to certain patrons being tossed out for one reason or another. It's part of the Ann Arbor scene."

"The Model A Ford roadster could or could not have been there at one time. I'm sure the street was brick underneath the asphalt. You will

Law offices, 300 East Washington at South Fifth Avenue

notice that there is a hitching post left from an earlier era. The lady sitting on top of the roadster is doing her best to attract somebody."

12. State and North University, with cows grazing on fenced UM campus as they once did. The cows "did double duty. They furnished milk and cut the grass."

"In this picture you have a real mix-up. The young lady in blue 1910 costume is talking to a lad of today which is not very possible but nevertheless she is. The girl on the left is from the 1950s and the crowd on the right in an open Model T touring car is from the roaring twenties.

"In the background is Haven Hall which burned in 1950. The maple tree you see is likely one of the original trees planted when the campus was laid out since it was practically bare of trees. Two different times they planted trees. The second time was successful.

"The fence and posts in the gateway were there to keep the cows in. The fence was there for about 20 years."

13. Osias Zwerdling Building across East Liberty from the Federal Building with an early delivery truck.

"You won't see the 1918 lady or the 1910 era boys in black pants and white shirts, mystified at this 1904 model truck. They don't know what to call it. They've seen very few of them."

"It's unlikely that this 1904 model (Crestmobile delivery truck) manufactured in Cambridge, Massachusetts, (steered by a tiller) was here but it is likely some very similar were made around here."

14. The former Ann Arbor Michigan Central Depot, now Gandy Dancer Restaurant. "I started this picture in 1986 and almost immediately I ran into a problem. This is what triggered, I think, the idea of mixing the other historical periods."

"One person said, if you would make it black it would have been more natural. The stones were very dirty. But what bothered me, I didn't know what color the trim work was, for instance, back in the 1880s.

"Three windows were originally open archways, the bridge was different than now. So rather than spend weeks and months trying to get all the details together, the idea of mixing periods seemed better.

Many details you could argue were not as I have done them. My way of doing it is to eliminate the arguments and make a more interesting picture."

15. The art deco style Ann Arbor Greyhound Bus Station on West Huron Street, with a 1934 De Soto Aireflo car in front of it.

"I recently read an account in the *Ann Arbor News* about the bus station and it made a statement there that sets up a quandary. It stated there that the building was built in 1939."

Bower works from photographs, many that he takes himself. This painting, however, is based on a copy a friend received from a friend in New York who said it was from an original Chrysler advertisement of the 1934 car before it was put on the market, leading Bower to think the bus depot had to have been built before that.

He added an up to date Chrysler to his painting to show the contrast.

16. South State Street at North University. "This is a scene you never could see at any one time. The boy on the skateboard has already made history because he would no longer be allowed to skateboard on State Street unless he disobeyed the law."

"(Looking west) the brick building is still there. It is now gray and stands near Nickels Arcade. See the cigar store Indian holding down the dusty street in front of the place of business."

The former J.H. Nickels house in Greek Revival style, now gone, appears on the left. There is a Model T Ford in the picture.

WHERE MIGHT THIS BUCOLIC SCENE BE? The cows are grazing in Ann Arbor's Bird Hills. Across the river is what is now Barton Hills before it was developed. Barton powerhouse and dam, built in 1912, is in the photo along with two bungalows to the right for Detroit Edison Company employees who operated the powerhouse. Erwin Steeb who loaned us the picture thinks it was taken around 1915.

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS INVOLVE VALENTINES, CRAFTS, LIBRARIES, BARNS

Chelsea Historical Society: Museum in depot now open 1-3 p.m. Mondays, Thurdays and Saturdays or by appointment (call 475-7047). Old valentine display in February along with train items.

Normally meet 7:30 p.m. second Monday at depot, however February founders dinner was to be the 8th at the depot.

Dexter Society: Annual craft fair 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, March 18, in high school gym. Meetings 8 p.m. first Thursday at museum, 3443 Inverness. Museum open by appointment only until spring (call 426-2519).

Manchester Society: Elizabeth Boyd of Manchester, a UM library science student, will speak on the history of libraries in Washtenaw County, the subject of her dissertation.

The program is in recognition of Manchester township library's 150th anniversary. Some former librarians and board members will also take part in the program.

Milan Society: 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Hack House, 775 County Street.

Pittsfield Society: 2 p.m. first Sunday at township hall, State and Ellsworth Roads.

Saline Society: 7 p.m. third Wednesday at Saline Senior Center, 7605 Maple Road. UM Professor Hemalata Dandekar will present a program on Michigan barns Wednesday, February 15.

Ypsilanti Society: Miss Ellen Gould's large collection of antique Valentines will again be on display at the museum during February.

Miss Gould, a retired teacher in her nineties, who lives at the Gilbert Residence, taught country school mostly in Augusta township. Her collection includes many lacy and fold-out cards.

The museum, 220 North Huron, is open 2-4 p.m. Friday-Sunday. The gift shop is having a half-price sale through February. It is open 9 a.m.-noon weekdays as well as during museum hours.

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"Why are our sidewalks in winter like music? If you do not C sharp you will B flat."

From *Harper's Bazar*, Januay 13, 1872.

HOW TO JOIN WCHS

Send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to Washtenaw County Historical Society to: WCHS Membership, 312 South Division Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2204. Information: 996-3008.

Annual dues are $10, individual; $18 a couple. Senior individual (60) $8, senior couple $14. Sustaining dues are $50, commercial, $25, and student, $5. Only one of a couple need by 60 to quality as seniors.

CHELSEA OFFICERS

Arlene Lynch is the new president of Chelsea Historical Society. Kathleen Clark is vice-president; David Pastor, treasurer; and Rose Rinehart, secretary. Board members are Marjorie Hepburn and Angie Smith.

CERTIFICATES OFFERED

Hand-lettered certificates are offered free of charge, framed if desired, by WCHS to organizations for milestone anniversaries. Information: 663-8826. If readers know of such anniversaries coming up, please let us know.

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